

Land-rights group ALOHA revived by its founder

By Mark Matsunaga
Advertiser Staff Writer

ALOHA is back.

The pioneering Hawaiian organization is holding a 23rd anniversary banquet-luau Dec. 17 at the Kona Resort Beach Hotel, according to its founder, the irrepressible Louisa Makaiwi Rice DeMello.

DeMello, then known as Louisa Rice, formed ALOHA in the early '70s. A full-blooded Hawaiian, born on Maui and reared on Molokai, she said she was inspired by a fire in her taxicab in the parking lot where she and her husband were living at the time. The fire destroyed the car, but left unscathed a copy of Queen Lili'uokalani's autobiography, "Hawaii's Story," that was inside.

A few months later, DeMello formed the group Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry, dedicated to obtaining \$1 billion in reparations from the federal government for lands taken by the United States government after the 1893 overthrow of Lili'uokalani. The group also sought redress for breaches of the Hawaiian Homes trust. Along the way, it drew much help from Stanley McCutcheon, an Alaska lawyer who obtained a \$1 billion settlement for native Alaskans.

ALOHA enlisted hundreds of Hawaiians at shopping centers and bowling alleys in the early '70s, and grew powerful enough that then-U.S. Reps. Spark Matsunaga and Patsy Mink introduced a bill in Congress in 1974 seeking \$1 billion to settle Hawaiian claims.

The bill went nowhere, but Congress eventually OK'd legislation to create a commission to examine those claims. That turned out to be the Native Hawaiian Study Commission of the early 1980s.



DeMello

TICKETS

Tickets for the banquet are \$45 each, \$25 for children. Contact Louisa DeMello at P.O. Box 1700, Waiānāe 96792. Or contact Arthur Hoke in Hilo, Richard Hoopii of Kahakuloa on Maui; Elaine Kaopuikilon Lanai, Jerry Kaluna on Kauai, Tilden Kalama Han on Molokai or Edward DeMello in Kona.

DeMello rejected the idea of a commission and had, by then, left ALOHA and Hawaii. She said she went to Alaska, making a living painting portraits. She said she later attended the University of North Dakota for three years, went on a Mormon mission, and also went to school and learned to drive heavy trucks.

But she's back in action, and so is ALOHA, which now stands for Ancestral Lands of Hawaiian Aborigines. And the mission has changed.

"Hey, if they're going to give us money because we own the land, why take the money? Let's keep the land," she said last week. At the banquet, she'll unveil a treaty she has drafted and ask for ratification from the members. Other Hawaiians can send in their opinions, she said.

The formal name of the new organization, she said, is ALOHA — Republic of Hawaii.

It has nothing to do with the government that ruled Hawaii from 1894 until annexation in 1898, she said.

"I put 'the Republic of Hawaii' to refute the Hawaiian sovereignty issue," said DeMello, who calls the sovereignty advocates of recent years "Johnny-come-latelys."

"I'm highly sensitive to the fact I'm American also," said DeMello, now 72, mother of 12 and grandmother to 60 or so.

"I didn't want to offend our government, because we grew up in it, it took care of us. I'm not going to see it go sovereign."

She said she represents those Hawaiians who do not protest, but simply want their inheritance.

DeMello said that, under her vision of Hawaii's future, "no American will be deprived of their homes." People who came here after '73 — there's a two-year grace period from the date she founded ALOHA — "cannot own fee-simple land because by then we knew they didn't own the land," DeMello said.

"It's going to be a headache, I know, but I'm praying to God it'll be done peacefully."

DeMello claims ALOHA has 75,000 lifetime members, one-third of them non-Hawaiian honorary members.